

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS REGARDING MONTANA INDIANS

Model Curriculum

Developed by the Office of Public Instruction

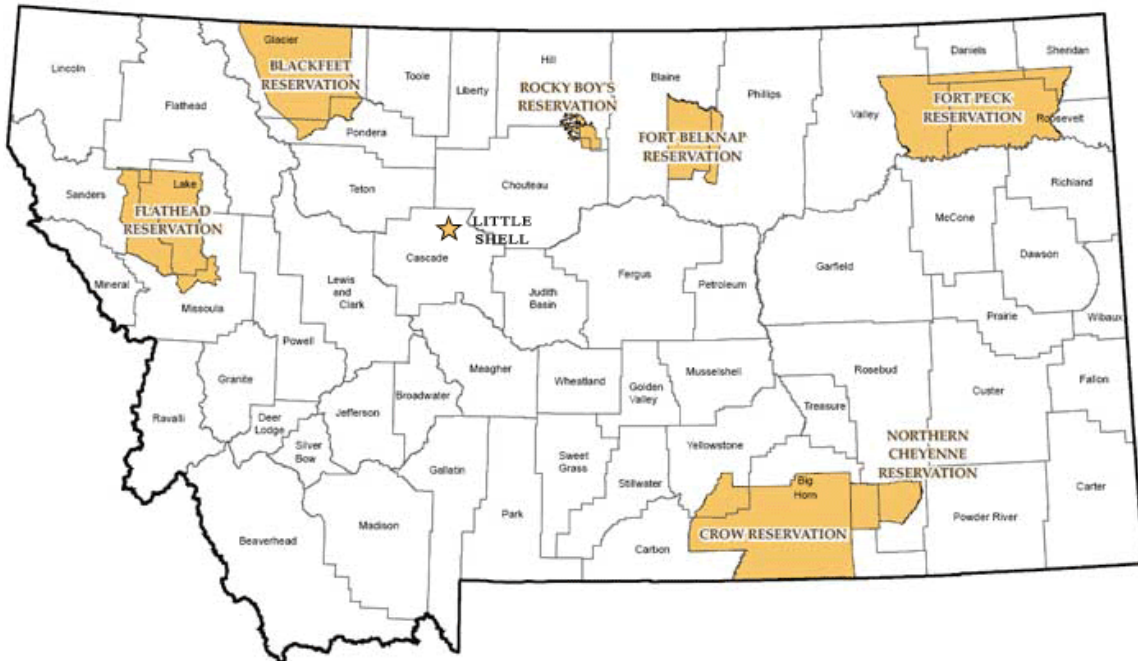


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ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 1

There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

BACKGROUND



(Map provided courtesy of Governor's American Indian Nations (GAIN) Council)

A reservation is a territory reserved by tribes as a permanent tribal homeland. Some reservations were created through treaties while others were created by statutes or executive orders.

RESERVATIONS: TRIBAL GROUPS:

Flathead	Salish, Kootenai, Pend d' Oreille
Blackfeet	Blackfeet
Rocky Boy's	Chippewa-Cree
Fort Belknap	Gros Ventre, Assiniboine
Fort Peck	Sioux, Assiniboine
Northern Cheyenne	Northern Cheyenne
Crow	Crow

The Little Shell Chippewa Tribe is without a reservation or land base and members live in various parts of Montana. Their tribal headquarters is located in Great Falls, Montana.

About 35 percent of Montana's Indian population do not live on reservations, and, instead, reside in the small communities or urban areas of Montana. The individual history and circumstances of Montana's urban Indian people are as diverse as the people themselves.

Most Montana Indian students attend public schools across the state. There are only two tribally controlled K-12 schools in Montana. Each reservation also has its own tribally controlled community college.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 2

There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined by many entities, organizations, and people. There is a continuum of Indian identity ranging from assimilated to traditional and is unique to each individual. There is no generic American Indian.

BACKGROUND

Identity is an issue with which human beings struggle throughout their lifetime. Questions of "Who am I?" and "How do I fit in?" are universal questions of the human condition. Schools have historically been a place for students to explore their identity. However, when the culture of students' homes and communities are not evident in school, finding a way to belong within that system is more difficult and can lead to frustration. Educators need to ensure that each student has an opportunity to feel included in the classroom either through materials or pedagogical practices.

Even larger issues of "Who is an Indian/Tribal Member?" are questions among Indian people themselves. The federal, state, and tribal governments may all have their own definition for who is a member. As a general principle an Indian is a person who is of some degree Indian blood and is recognized as an Indian by a tribe/village and/or the United States. There exists no universally accepted rule for establishing a person's identity as an Indian. The criteria for tribal membership differs from one tribe to the next. To determine a particular tribe's criteria, one must contact that tribe directly. For its own purposes, the Bureau of the Census counts anyone an Indian who declares to be such (Native American Rights Fund).

Amidst all of these issues, educators must remember that Indian students come to school with a variety of backgrounds. They have differences of skin color, dress, and behavior; and there may be deeper and subtler differences of values and of ways of being and learning.

A continuum exists between traditional and nontraditional American Indian students. And within the continuum there are those who show characteristics of American Indian ways of being and belief and those who show themselves to be American Indian yet do not have what some people might at first see as American Indian behavior and appearance.

What is important is that all humans be allowed feelings of integrity and pride connected with who they are, with whom they identify. Respecting what others value and do is a way to help them develop both the self-esteem and the feelings of integrity that will enhance their learning.

It should also be noted that there is not a single American Indian learning style, nor is there a group of several styles of learning that fits all American Indians, either as individuals or tribal groups. Teachers should recognize that there are a variety of learning styles and adapt their teaching methods to the individual learner. At the same time teachers should build on and expand the individual student's approaches to learning. However, recognizing that teachers must use a variety of teaching methods to meet individual learning styles does not mean that culture doesn't have an influence on learning styles. The differences in the cultures of home and school certainly impact the teaching-learning process. Classrooms need to integrate culture into the curriculum to blur the boundaries between home and school. Schools need to become a part of, rather than apart from, the communities in which they serve (Collected Wisdom).

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 3

The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the "discovery" of North America.

BACKGROUND

American Indian languages, cultures, and traditions are alive and well throughout Indian country. Although, in some aspects, much of the culture has changed, this does not mean that culture is dead, it has only become transformed through a process of acculturation. Indigenous languages are still spoken, sacred songs are still sung, and rituals are still performed. It is not important for us to understand all of the complexities of modern day, contemporary American Indian culture but it is important that we do have an understanding and awareness that these cultures exist and influence much of the thinking and practice of American Indians today.

These histories and traditions may be private, to be used and understood only by members of that particular tribe. Educators should be aware of this issue when asking students about their histories, ceremonies, and stories.

Educators should also be consistent with policies surrounding "religious/spiritual

activities” and ensure that Native traditions and spirituality are on par with other religious traditions and spirituality.

Each tribe has a history that can be traced to the beginning of time. Many of these histories will be told only orally as they have been passed down through generations. These histories are as valid as any other mythology or belief. Some tribes may only tell certain stories during certain times of the year and this knowledge should be respected in classrooms.

Many tribal histories place their people in their current traditional lands in Montana. Be cognizant of this issue when teaching about “the history of mankind,” in particular, about the Bering Strait Theory. The use of revisionist history is a positive teaching tool to look at various perspectives of historical occurrences and questioning the idea of who wrote history and how that viewpoint plays out in today’s society.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 4

Reservations are land that have been reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties and was not “given” to them. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:

- I. That both parties to treaties were sovereign powers.*
- II. That Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.*
- III. That acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists.*

BACKGROUND

Indian Nations located in Montana Territory prior to the passage of the Montana Constitution in 1889, held large land bases as negotiated through their treaties with the United States. The treaties assigned tribes to certain areas and obligated them to respect the land of their neighbors. However, in the 1860s, as miners and others rushed into the prime gold fields that often lay along or within the designated tribal lands, tribal life was disrupted. The new inhabitants demanded federal protection; this started the garrisoning of Montana and the eventual relocation of the tribes to smaller and smaller reserves.

The federal government and the Montana citizens did not understand the lifestyles of Montana’s Indian tribes and, therefore, dealt with them from the expectations and from the non-Indian point of view. However, the federal government did understand that these tribal groups were sovereign nations and they needed to enter into treaty negotiations with them.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 5

There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have impacted Indian people and shape who they are today. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods.

Examples:

Colonization Period

Treaty Period

Allotment Period

Boarding School Period

Tribal Reorganization

Termination

Self-determination

(See the OPI Publication A History and Foundation of American Indian Education Policy)

BACKGROUND

Public schools began to operate on Indian reservations in Montana in the early 1900s. Although public schools were originally opened to meet the educational needs of non-Indian children residing on Indian reservations, Indian students began to enroll almost from the beginning. The public schools provided an opportunity for Indian people to receive an education in their local communities. The curriculum and instruction in public schools was, and continues to be, designed to meet the standards of the state education system. The curriculum offered limited information on the local Indian culture, history and traditions of the local tribal groups, and it did not encourage participation from local tribal government officials in its decision-making policies. However, this trend is beginning to change as Indian people become empowered to lead and make decisions about their local schools. There are now Indian people involved in the system as teachers, administrators, and school board members who are cognizant of the fact that communities and schools must be linked together in order to improve educational outcomes for Indian students (see the OPI publication A History and Foundation of American Indian Education Policy).

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 6

History is a story and most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. Histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective conflicts with what most of mainstream history tells us.

BACKGROUND

Much of our history has been told from one perspective. It has been only recently that American Indians have begun to write about and retell history from an Indigenous

perspective.

Books such as *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by James W. Loewen expose the underlying bias that exists within much of our history curriculum by leaving certain voices out of the stories. In examining current curriculum content it is important to keep the following in mind:

Children's history books use terms such as "westward expansion" and "Manifest Destiny" to describe what would be more accurately called ethnic genocide. These books alternately portray Indians as "noble savages," "faithful Indian guides," or "sneaky savages" who lead "ambushes" and "massacres," while in contrast, cavalrymen fight "brave battles." These books propagandize the "glory and honor" of taking land and oppressing native people for European purposes that are portrayed as holy and valid (Loewen 1996).

A multicultural history curriculum, by focusing on the experiences of men and women of diverse racial, ethnic, and religious groups in United States history, will provide students with a historical context in which to situate and understand the experiences and perspectives of these groups in American society today (Mehan, 1995). A transformation such as this would benefit all Americans as we work on building a free and democratic society for all.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING 7

Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe.

BACKGROUND

Mark A. Chavaree, Esq., "Tribal Sovereignty," Wabanaki Legal News, Volume 2, Issue 1, winter 1998:

Before colonization, Indian tribes possessed complete sovereignty. However, given the governmental structure of the United States and the complex history of tribal-federal relations, tribes are now classified as domestic dependent nations. This means tribes have the power to define their own membership; structure and operate their tribal governments; regulate domestic relations; settle disputes; manage their property and resources; raise tax revenues; regulate businesses; and conduct relations with other governments. It also means that the federal government is obligated to protect tribal lands and resources; protect the tribe's right to self-government; and provide social, medical, educational and economic development services necessary for the survival and advancement of tribes.

A very important, but often unappreciated, point is that tribal sovereignty does not arise out of the United States government, congressional acts, executive orders, treaties or any other source outside the tribe. As Felix Cohen puts it, "perhaps the most basic principle of

all Indian law... is that those powers which are lawfully vested in an Indian tribe are not, in general, delegated powers granted by expressed acts of Congress, but rather `inherent powers of a limited sovereignty, which has never been extinguished (NARF).”

Sovereignty can be defined as "The supreme power from which all political powers are derived." It is "inherent"--- It cannot be given to one group by another. In government-to-government negotiations, states and Indian nations exercise or use their sovereign powers.

Sovereignty ensures self-government, cultural preservation, and a peoples' control of their future. Sovereignty affirms the political identity of Indian Nations --- They are not simply a racial or ethnic minority.